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978-1-108-02312-2 - The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte, Emperor of the
French, Volume 2

Walter Scott

Excerpt

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THE
L I F E
OF
N A P O L E O N B U O N A P A R T E ;
WITH A
PRELIMINARY VIEW OF THE FRENCH
REVOLUTION.

VOL. II.

A

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N A P O L E O N B U O N A P A R T E .

CHAPTER I.

VIEW OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

The Day of the 10th of August—Tocsin sounded early in the Morning.—Swiss Guards, and relics of the Royal Party, repair to the Tuilleries.—Mandat assassinated.—Dejection of Louis, and energy of the Queen.—King's Ministers appear at the Bar of the Assembly, stating the peril of the Royal Family, and requesting a Deputation might be sent to the Palace.—Assembly pass to the Order of the Day.—Louis and his Family repair to the Assembly.—Conflict at the Tuilleries.—Swiss ordered to repair to the King's Person—and are many of them shot and dispersed on their way to the Assembly.—At the close of the Day almost all of them are massacred.—Royal Family spend the Night in the neighbouring Convent of the Feuillans.

THE King had, since the insurrection of the 20th of June, which displayed how much he was at the mercy of his enemies, renounced almost all thoughts of safety or escape. Henry IV. would have called for his arms

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—Louis XVI. demanded his confessor. “I have no longer anything to do with earth,” he said; “I must turn all my thoughts on Heaven.” Some vain efforts were made to bribe the leaders of the Jacobins, who took the money, and pursued, as might have been expected, their own course with equal rigour. The motion for the declaration of the King’s forfeiture still lingered in the Convention, its fate depending upon the coming crisis. At length the fatal 10th of August approached, being the day which, after repeated adjournments, had been fixed by the Girondists and their rivals for the final rising.

The King was apprised of their intention, and had hastily recalled from their barracks at Courbe-Voie about a thousand Swiss guards, upon whose fidelity he could depend. The formidable discipline and steady demeanour of these gallant mountaineers, might have recalled the description given by historians, of the entrance of their predecessors into Paris under similar circumstances, the day before the affair of the Barricades, in the reign of Henry II.* But the present moment was too anxious to admit of reflections upon past history.

* Thus imitated by the dramatist Lee, from the historian Davila :

“Have you not heard—the King, preventing day,
Received the guards within the city gates;
The jolly Swisses marching to their pipes,
The crowd stood gaping heedless and amazed,
Shrunk to their shops, and left the passage free.”

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Early on the morning of the 10th of August, the tocsin rung out its alarm peal over the terrified city of Paris, and announced that the long-menaced insurrection was at length on foot. In many parishes the Constitutional party resisted those who came to sound this awful signal; but the well-prepared Jacobins were found everywhere victorious, and the prolonged mournful sound was soon tolled out from every steeple in the metropolis.

To this melancholy music the contending parties arranged their forces for attack and defence, upon a day which was doomed to be decisive.

The Swiss guards got under arms, and repaired to their posts in and around the palace. About four hundred grenadiers of the loyal section of Filles Saint Thomas, joined by several from that of Les Petits Peres, in whom all confidence could justly be reposed, were posted in the interior of the palace, and associated with the Swiss for its defence. The relics of the Royalist party, undismayed at the events of the 28th of February in the year preceding,* had repaired to the palace on the first signal given by the tocsin. Joined to the domestic attendants of the royal family, they might amount to about four hun-

* When they were in similar circumstances maltreated by the National Guard. See vol. I. page 243.

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dred persons. Nothing can more strongly mark the unprepared state of the court, than that there were neither muskets nor bayonets for suitably arming these volunteers, nor any supply of ammunition, save what the Swiss and national grenadiers had in their pouches. The appearance also of this little troop tended to inspire dismay rather than confidence. The chivalrous cry of "Entrance for the Noblesse of France," was the signal for their filing into the presence of the royal family. Alas! instead of the thousand nobles whose swords used to gleam around their monarch at such a crisis, there entered but veteran officers of rank, whose strength, though not their spirit, was consumed by years, mixed with boys scarce beyond the age of children, and with men of civil professions, several of whom, Lamoignon Malesherbes for example, had now for the first time worn a sword. Their arms were as miscellaneous as their appearance. Rapiers, hangers, and pistols, were the weapons with which they were to encounter bands well provided with musketry and artillery. Their courage, however, was unabated. It was in vain that the Queen conjured, almost with tears, men aged fourscore and upwards, to retire from a contest where their strength could avail so little. The veterans felt that the fatal hour was come, and, unable to fight, claimed the privilege of dying in the discharge of their duty.

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The behaviour of Marie Antoinette was magnanimous in the highest degree. "Her majestic air," says Peltier, "her Austrian lip, and aquiline nose, gave her an air of dignity, which can only be conceived by those who beheld her in that trying hour." Could she have inspired the King with some portion of her active spirit, he might even at that extreme hour have wrested the victory from the Revolutionists; but the misfortunes which he could endure like a saint, he could not face and combat like a hero; and his scruples about shedding human blood well nigh unmanned him.

The distant shouts of the enemy were already heard, while the Gardens of the Tuilleries were filled by the successive legions of the National Guard, with their cannon. Of this civic force, some, and especially the artillerymen, were as ill-disposed towards the King as was possible; others were well inclined to him; and the greater part remained doubtful. Mandat, their commander, was entirely in the royal interests. He had disposed the force he commanded to the best advantage for discouraging the mutinous, and giving confidence to the well-disposed, when he received an order to repair to the municipality for orders. He went thither accordingly, expecting the support of such Constitutionals as remained in that magistracy, but he found it entirely in possession of the Jacobin party. Mandat was arrested, and order-

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ed a prisoner to the Abbaye, which he never reached, being pistoled by an assassin at the gate of the Hotel de Ville. His death was an infinite loss to the King's party.

A signal advantage had at the same time been suffered to escape. Pethion, the Brissotin Mayor of Paris, was now observed among the National Guards. The Royalists possessed themselves of his person, and brought him to the palace, where it was proposed to detain this popular magistrate as an hostage. Upon this, his friends in the Assembly moved that he should be brought to the bar, to render an account of the state of the capital; a message was dispatched accordingly requiring his attendance, and Louis had the weakness to permit him to depart.

The motions of the assailants were far from being so prompt and lively as upon former occasions, when no great resistance was anticipated. Santerre, an eminent brewer, who, from his great capital, and his affectation of popular zeal, had raised himself to the command of the suburb forces, was equally inactive in mind and body, and by no means fitted for the desperate part which he was called on to play. Westerman, a zealous Republican, and a soldier of skill and courage, came to press Santerre's march, informing him that the Marseillois and Breton Federates were in arms in the Place du Carousel, and expected the advance of the pikemen from the sub-

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[More information](#)

urbs of Saint Antoine and St Marçeau. On Santerre's hesitating, Westerman placed his sword-point at his throat, and the citizen commandant, yielding to the nearer terror, put his bands at length in motion. Their numbers were immense. But the real strength of the assault was to lie on the Federates of Marseilles and Bretagne, and other provinces, who had been carefully provided with arms and ammunition. They were also secure of the Gens-d'armes, or soldiers of police, although these were called out and arranged on the King's side. The Marseillois and Bretons were placed at the head of the long columns of the suburb pikemen, as the edge of an axe is armed with steel, while the back is of coarser metal to give weight to the blow. The charge of the attack was committed to Westerman.

In the meantime, the defenders of the palace advised Louis to undertake a review of the troops assembled for his defence. His appearance and mien were deeply dejected, and he wore, instead of an uniform, a suit of violet, which is the mourning colour of sovereigns. His words were broken and interrupted, like the accents of a man in despair, and void of the energy suitable to the occasion. "I know not," he said, "what they would have from me—I am willing to die with my faithful servants—Yes, gentlemen, we will at length do our best to resist." It was in vain that the Queen laboured to inspire

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her husband with a tone more resolved—in vain that she even snatched a pistol from the belt of the Comte d’Affray, and thrust it into the King’s hand, saying, “Now is the moment to show yourself as you are.” Indeed, Barbaroux, whose testimony can scarce be doubted, declares his firm opinion, that had the King at this time mounted his horse, and placed himself at the head of the National Guards, they would have followed him, and succeeded in putting down the Revolution. History has its strong parallels, and one would think we are writing of Margaret of Anjou, endeavouring in vain to inspire determination into her virtuous but feeble-minded husband.

Within the palace, the disposition of the troops seemed excellent, and there, as well as in the courts of the Tuilleries, the King’s address was answered with shouts of “*Vive le Roi!*” But when he sallied out into the garden, his reception from the legions of the National Guard was at least equivocal, and that of the artillerymen, and of a battalion from Saint Marçeau, was decidedly unfavourable. Some cried, “*Vive la Nation!*” Some, “Down with the tyrant!” The King did nothing to encourage his own adherents, or to crush his enemies, but retired to hold counsel in the palace, around which the storm was fast gathering.

It might have been expected that the Assembly, in which the Constitutionalists possessed so strong a

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majority as to throw out the accusation against La Fayette by a triumphant vote, might now, in the hour of dread necessity, have made some effort to save the crown which that Constitution recognized, and the innocent life of the prince by whom it was occupied. But fear had laid strong possession upon these unworthy and ungenerous representatives. The ministers of the King appeared at the bar, and represented the state of the city and of the palace, conjuring the Assembly to send a deputation to prevent bloodshed. This was courageous on the part of those faithful servants; for to intimate the least interest in the King's fate, was like the bold swimmer who approaches the whirlpool caused by the sinking of a gallant vessel. The measure they proposed had been resorted to on the 20th June preceding, and was then successful, even though the deputation consisted of members the most unfriendly to the King. But now, the Assembly passed to the order of the day, and thereby left the fate of the King and capital to chance, or the result of battle.

In the meantime, the palace was completely invested. The bridge adjacent to the Tuilleries, called the Pont Royal, was occupied by the insurgents, and the Quai on the opposite side of the river was mounted with cannon, of which the assailants had about fifty pieces, served by the most determined Ja-